



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Strohal, Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 29, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Strohal, the United States always looks forward to your appearances at the Permanent Council. We appreciate the valuable work your office does in helping States implement their human dimension commitments. The continued smooth and effective functioning of ODIHR has been due in great part to the professionalism with which you have led the institution.

We welcome the excellent work being conducted under the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Program. We support, in particular, the efforts of ODIHR in the area of training police officers to prevent and respond to hate crimes. Yet we suggest, and this refers back to what we said earlier this month at the Tolerance Meeting in Almaty, that States should enact legislation to ensure the equality of all citizens before the law. If we are to be truly successful in eradicating hate crimes, then energies should be focused on their root causes —discrimination and inequality. We also support the projects on combating anti-Semitism and promoting Holocaust Remembrance, as part of ODIHR's overall efforts to promote tolerance, mutual respect, and understanding.

The United States commends the role ODIHR has played in organizing the OSCE's human dimension meetings. We were impressed with this past spring's Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Human Rights Defenders. As stated at the conference, we are concerned that some participating States have failed to live up to their commitments under the 1990 Copenhagen Document by passing laws aiming to restrict the activities of NGOs. Despite this troubling trend, we are encouraged by the steady increase in the number of NGO participants at the human dimension meetings.

We consider the Democratization Program to be successful in strengthening democratic institutions throughout the region, especially in the realms of transparency and accountability. We are pleased especially that approximately 85% of the Program's experts come from "east of Vienna", a powerful symbol that democratic values continue to spread throughout the entire OSCE community. These experts play a vital role in assisting States that want to strengthen their democratic institutions, ensure equality for women and men participating in political processes, and make certain that their legislation lives up to their international obligations and OSCE commitments.

We applaud the outstanding work of the Human Rights Section of ODIHR, especially in the areas of freedom of assembly, trial monitoring, and human rights training and education. We are very interested in two of the Human Rights Section's newest initiatives: the project on combating violent extremism through attention to human rights issues, and the work your

office is doing on Human Rights of Armed Forces Personnel. We have sent in our response to the questionnaire on Human Rights in the Armed Forces and look forward to seeing our input reflected in the forthcoming Handbook. We encourage very strongly other States to respond to the questionnaire and support this project. We believe a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on the issue of human rights and the armed forces in 2007 could lead to productive discussions in a cross-dimensional setting.

Mr. Ambassador, you cited the work that ODIHR does on human rights and terrorism. We agree that this is a very important issue. As Powell Moore, the United States Defense Secretary's representative to the OSCE, noted on Tuesday at the opening of the ASRC, the United States and Russia will propose a joint conference to be conducted next spring that will explore ways for governments to work closely with the private sector and civil society to help combat terrorism in a public-private partnership. ODIHR will play a key role in providing guidance and input on this.

With the assistance of ODIHR, many participating States have improved significantly the conduct of elections in the past few years. We recognize that this has not been easy for a number of States. We applaud those that have managed to make so much progress in a relatively short period of time. Their achievements should be mentioned and praised more often.

Unfortunately, not all States have advanced as far as they could have, due, it appears, to a lack of political will to undertake fundamental systemic change and implement their OSCE commitments. Problems continue to exist – or have even increased – in a handful of participating States. It is the duty of ODIHR – and all of ours as well – to draw attention to these violations and provide assistance to help those States improve their performance.

As we have noted before, the standards set by ODIHR for election observation continue to be the hallmark that other organizations strive to meet. Your office as well as all participating States can be rightfully proud of the efforts they have made over the years to contribute to this accomplishment. The Ljubljana Ministerial tasking will help us to take stock of the lessons learned over the past years and make refinements to the election-related procedures and activities undertaken by ODIHR. These refinements should reinforce the relevance and effectiveness of assistance to the participating States provided by ODIHR. We look forward to a more in-depth discussion of this at the July 7th meeting.

In conclusion, we would like to thank you, Ambassador Strohal, and your staff for the excellent work you are all doing. We stand ready to support you in further strengthening the already outstanding work done by ODIHR in the human dimension.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.